

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD AT SCHENECTADY, N.Y.,
ON JANUARY 6, 1926.

February 25, 1926.

To the Commission:

On January 6, 1926, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the New York Central Railroad at Schenectady, N.Y., resulting in the death of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Mohawk Division extending between Albany and Syracuse, N.Y., a distance of 147.39 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a four-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The tracks are numbered from north to south as follows: 4, 3, 1, and 2, track 4 being the eastward freight track. The accident occurred within the interlocking and yard limits of Schenectady, on track 4, at a point about 2,500 feet east of signal station 8.

The home interlocking signal involved is located about 600 feet west of signal station 8, between tracks 3 and 1; this is a single mast supporting three semaphore blades, each blade being of the three-position, upper quadrant type. The night indications of the bottom blade, the one involved, governing movements on track 4, are red, yellow, and green, for stop, proceed at slow speed prepared to stop, and proceed at slow speed to the next signal, respectively. The next signal is automatic signal 15894, located 4,688 feet east of the home interlocking signal, and 1,579 feet east of the point of accident, this is a three-position, upper quadrant signal.

Approaching the point of accident from the west there is a 30° 40' curve to the left 1,250 feet in length, followed by about 100 feet of tangent to the point of collision. The grade is descending and then slightly ascending for eastbound trains.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 7.14 p.m.

Description

Eastbound freight train YV-2 consisted of 21 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2681, and was in charge of Conductor Miller and Engineman Stall. This train was standing on track 4 with its rear end at a point 3,109 feet east of the home interlocking signal waiting for a switch engine to bring additional cars out of the yard, when it was struck by train RV-2.

Eastbound freight train RV-2, hauled by engine 2516, was in charge of Conductor Butler and Engineman Murnane. On its arrival at Schenectady all the cars in the train were cut off, after which the engine coupled to the caboose, and on receiving a yellow indication on the home interlocking signal, the requirements of which were to proceed at slow speed prepared to stop, it moved eastward on track 4 and was brought to a stop at signal station 8, at which point verbal instructions were received to assist train YV-2 to Carman, 3.23 miles east of Schenectady. It departed from signal station 8 at about 7.10 p.m., and collided with the rear end of train YV-2 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 12 or 14 miles an hour.

The caboose of train YV-2 was practically demolished, and one car was overturned and damaged, while engine 2516 was slightly damaged. The employee killed was a brakeman, who was in the caboose of train YV-2 at the time of the accident.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Murnane, of train RV-2, stated that after coupling the engine to the caboose on track 4 at Schenectady and receiving a yellow indication on the home interlocking signal he proceeded eastward and brought the engine to a stop at signal station 8. Brakeman Mecler went into the tower and returned with instructions to the effect that train YV-2 was standing on the hill and that they were to assist that train to Carman. Engine 2516 departed from the tower and when about opposite the freight house, located near the west end of the curve preceding the tangent on which the accident occurred, traveling at a speed of about 6 or 7 miles an hour, Fireman Campbell called the indication displayed on automatic signal

15894, located beyond where the accident occurred, as "GREEN". Engineman Murnane could not see the indication displayed by this signal at this time, owing to the curve, but remarked that train RV-2 must be farther up the hill and then increased the speed. Shortly afterwards, apparently at about the time he reached the end of the curve, he saw the caboose of train YV-2, which seemed to be about two car-lengths distant, and although he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency it was too late to avert the accident; he estimated the speed of his engine to have been about 12 miles an hour when the collision occurred. Engineman Murnane admitted that he should have operated his engine expecting to find automatic signal 15894 displaying a stop indication, or track 4 occupied between the home interlocking signal and signal 15834; also that the requirements of the rules are to move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear, but inferred that he was misled by the fireman.

Fireman Campbell, of train RV-2, stated that when his engine was about 200 feet west of the freight house while rounding the curve, he leaned against the seat box, looked across the tops of the cars standing on the adjoining yard tracks, and called the indication displayed by signal 15894 as "GREEN". He said he then adjusted the jet on the stoker, and was about to get on his seat box when the engineman applied the air brakes in emergency.

Conductor Butler, Brakeman Meeker and Ward, of train RV-2, were riding in the caboose at the time of the accident and were unaware of anything wrong prior to the collision, their estimates as to the speed at the time of the accident were from 12 to 14 miles an hour.

None of the members of the crew of train YV-2 was aware of anything wrong until just prior to the accident. Conductor Miller was in the yard office, while of the three brakemen in the caboose, two saw the headlight of engine 2516 in time to jump before the accident occurred.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Murnane, of train RV-2, properly to obey signal indications and also to operate his train under proper control within yard limits.

Engineman Murnane acknowledged that under the interlocking signal indication he had received he should have operated his train expecting either to find signal 15894 displaying a stop indication or to encounter a train before reaching that signal, and when Fireman Campbell told him signal 15894 was displaying a clear indication he at once began to work steam, apparently overlooking the fact that according to that indication the train he was to assist probably was between his engine and the signal and that speed should be reduced instead of being increased.

While Fireman Campbell could see the indication of signal 15894 he could not see whether or not the track was occupied west of that signal. Under these circumstances, and knowing from the instructions received at signal station 8 that they were to close up on the rear of the preceding train he should have continued to maintain a lookout on his side of the engine, had he done so he might have been able to warn Engineman Murnane in time to avert the accident.

Engineman Murnane was an experienced man, while Fireman Campbell had qualified as an engineman. None of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.